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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Chiaramonte, A., & Maggini, N. (2013). The 2013 election results: protest voting and political stalemate. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 13(4), 641-658. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-447826>

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# The 2013 Election Results

## Protest Voting and Political Stalemate

ALESSANDRO CHIARAMONTE, NICOLA MAGGINI

As in 2006, the recent elections were very close. But, unlike in 2006, the 2013 election reached a stalemate. Pierluigi Bersani's center-left coalition won in the Chamber of deputies by only a 0.4% vote margin against Silvio Berlusconi's center-right. However, thanks to the electoral system, the winning coalition enjoys a substantial majority of seats. Not so in the Senate where the center-left is still the coalition that got a plurality of the popular vote, but the different electoral system from that of the Chamber did not translate it into a majority of seats. This is in a nutshell the outcome of the 2013 elections in Italy.

Indeed, the widespread expectation was that the center-left would win with a larger margin. Most of the polls had indicated a consistently favourable trend supportive of Bersani's coalition up to the last few days before the vote. What happened at the ballot box on February 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> is still an enigma to some extent. In this article we will try to give a preliminary explanation, analyzing the election background, the electoral systems, the result of the vote, its geographical articulation, the individual vote shifts, and the socio-demographic profile of the voters. Concluding remarks summarize the findings.

### *Election Background*

In the previous election of 2008 the victory of Berlusconi's center-right coalition was almost a landslide and its parties could enjoy a large parliamentary majority both in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate. It was actually the largest majority for a coalition in the Second Republic. After the election Berlusconi formed a cabinet which appeared to be the strongest ever in the Italian political history. Not only because of its solid parliamentary majority, but also because it consisted of only two parties, with Berlusconi's party – the *Popolo della libertà* (PdL, People of freedom) – being by far larger than the second one, that is the *Lega Nord* (LN, Northern league). Few weeks after the formation of his cabinet, Berlusconi's popularity was at its highest. Then it started to slowly go down, but it remained high – compared to the leaders of other countries – for some time even after the start of the economic crisis.

However, in the long run Berlusconi's popularity declined constantly for three main reasons<sup>1</sup>. The first is the worsening of the financial and economic crisis. When the prospects of a Greek default became real, Italy fell under the spotlight too and international investors reassessed the risk on its sovereign debt. This led to a sharp increase of the interests paid on the bonds issued to finance the debt, that would have not been sustainable for much longer. The second reason has to do with the sexual scandals related to Berlusconi's

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro CHIARAMONTE, Roberto D'ALIMONTE, "The Twilight of the Berlusconi Era: Local Elections and National Referendums in Italy, May and June 2011", *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 17, 2012, pp. 261-279.

private life. In 2009, his wife filed for divorce and publicly accused her husband of "consorting with minors" after he attended the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday party of an unknown young girl. The same year an "escort" woman revealed that she and many other girls were paid to attend parties at Berlusconi's residence. Finally, in 2010 Berlusconi was involved in the "Rubygate". Accused of having sex with an underage prostitute and for abuse of office relating to her release from detention, Berlusconi was later placed under criminal investigation. The third reason explaining the declining popularity of Berlusconi is the shrinking of his cabinet's parliamentary base, that became evident when Gianfranco Fini – speaker of the Chamber and co-founder of the PdL together with Berlusconi – left the PdL and formed a new political party, called *Futuro e libertà per l'Italia* (FLI, Future and freedom for Italy), against Berlusconi himself.

In November 2011 Berlusconi was at his lowest level of popularity and the financial crisis was at its highest level since 2008. Left without the support of a stable parliamentary majority, Berlusconi was forced to resign. He was replaced by Mario Monti, a well-known and internationally respected economic professor, who formed a technocratic emergency cabinet supported by parties from all political options, namely the leftist *Partito democratico* (PD, Democratic party), the centrist FLI and *Unione di centro* (UDC, Union of the center), and the rightist PdL. Only the LN and later *Italia dei valori* (IDV, Italy of values) were against. The new cabinet introduced an austerity package to restore markets confidence and the financial stability of the country. The economic measures implemented by the cabinet ranged from the pension reform to the labour market reform, from spending cuts to an increase in taxes. One year after the installation of the cabinet, the financial situation of the country appeared to be eventually under control. However, Berlusconi's PdL opportunistically withdrew its support to the technocratic cabinet on December 4, 2012, and attacked Monti's economic policies as too austere and dictated by Merkel's Germany. On 21 December 2012, Monti resigned as prime minister and forced elections a few months earlier than planned. Few days afterwards, Monti announced he would participate in the incoming general elections as the leader of a centrist coalition.

The electoral campaign saw four main political players – three coalitions and one independent party list – fiercely fighting each other. The center-left coalition led by Pierluigi Bersani and consisting of three main party lists – PD, *Sinistra ecologia e libertà* (SEL, Left, ecology and freedom), and *Centro democratico* (CD, Democratic center) – was expected to emerge with the most votes and lead a new cabinet, probably backed by Monti. Bersani, who had supported Monti's cabinet until the very end, hoped to present himself as the candidate most fit to govern the country. His campaign was, however, largely uninspiring and ultimately unsuccessful.

The main party lists of the center-right coalition were the PdL, the LN, and the new *Fratelli d'Italia* (FDI, Brothers of Italy). For the sixth consecutive election, Berlusconi ran as the coalition leader. He led an electoral campaign heavily focused on TV appearances and radio interviews. Despite the fact that he had guaranteed his support for Monti's cabinet over the past year, Berlusconi fiercely went on to attack his work and offered instead numerous eye-catching measures, such as a property tax (known as "Imu") refund.

As for the incumbent prime minister, Monti decided to found his own political party, *Scelta civica* (SC, Civic choice), and formed a centrist coalition together with UDC and FLI. The three parties ran with their own distinct lists in the elections for the Chamber. They had a different choice for the election for the Senate, where they ran with a joint list called *Con Monti per l'Italia*, so as to increase their chances to

surmount the threshold of representation in each region ("only" 8% for an individual list compared to 20% for a coalition).

The fourth main political actor to contest the 2013 election was the *Movimento 5 stelle* (M5S, Five star movement), an anti-establishment party created by Beppe Grillo, a comedian who had only been active in politics for 4-5 years, but who had quickly earned widespread popularity thanks to his blog. Grillo led his campaign mainly through Internet and in the public squares. In his speeches he criticized corrupt politicians, financial speculation, tax collectors, drawing support from a growing number of angry people who asked him to "send them all home", referring to the current members of Parliament and political parties<sup>1</sup>.

The date of the elections was set for February 24, and 25. Most of the polls indicated that the coalition of Bersani was in the lead up to the last few days before the vote. However, its margin of lead had decreased remarkably since the beginning of the campaign. Whether the center-left would receive a majority of seats, either alone or in a post-electoral alliance with Monti's coalition, it was then all but certain. In this regard the only one sure thing was the decisive role that the electoral system of the Chamber of deputies and especially that of the Senate would play.

### *The Electoral Systems*

The electoral system for the Chamber of deputies is, for the most part but not entirely, a proportional system with a majority premium. Indeed, with regard to the distribution of the 630 seats, it is necessary to distinguish between three arenas, each governed by its own rules. A first arena consists of 26 multi-member constituencies, covering the whole national territory, with the exception of the small Valle d'Aosta region. Each of the 26 constituencies is assigned a number of seats proportional to its resident population, for a total of 617 seats. The second arena consists of the single-member district of Valle d'Aosta where the only one seat at stake is allocated by plurality voting. Finally, the third arena, contains the "foreign" constituency of Italians living abroad, where 12 seats are distributed using a proportional method.

The first arena is the most important. Here a mixed "proportional-plus-majority-premium" formula is applied. In the first instance, the 617 seats are distributed proportionally, at the national level. In order to enter Parliament an independent party list has to gather at least 4% of the total valid votes. If a party list is a member of a coalition the threshold is lowered to 2%. Coalitions – identified by a leader and a common platform – may get seats only if they have at least 10% of valid votes and include at least one party list that received equal or more than 2% of the votes. Among the party lists which are members of a coalition, the list that received less than 2% of the votes, but more votes than any other is also admitted to the allocation of seats. Once the seats have been proportionally assigned, it is established whether the coalition or independent list with the largest number of votes obtained at least 340

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<sup>1</sup> Two other independent lists were also expected to gain a small but significant amount of votes, and possibly even some seats. The first was *Rivoluzione civile* (RC, Civil revolution), led by Antonio Ingrao, a former anti-mafia magistrate from Palermo. This list included the remnants of the 2008 *Sinistra arcobaleno* (SA, Rainbow left) and the IDV. The second was *Fare per fermare il declino* (FFD, Act to stop the decline), a liberal democratic party founded and headed by the journalist Oscar Giannino.

seats. If this is not the case, then it triggers assignment of the majority premium which "annuls" the purely proportional distribution of seats: the winning coalition or list gets 340 seats and the remaining 277 seats are distributed between the other coalitions and lists. After the number of seats due to each of the coalitions and independent lists has been established, seats are then distributed, for each coalition, among the various component lists. Finally, within each of the 26 constituencies, seats are distributed first to the coalitions and independent lists, then to the lists belonging to coalitions. Candidates are elected according to the order in which they appear on the list.

Thanks to the premium, the electoral system for the Chamber of deputies is "majority-assuring", insofar as the winning coalition or list obtains in any case – and therefore independently of the proportion of votes it has obtained – at least 340 seats, a number equivalent to about 54% of the total of Chamber seats, and thus more than the absolute majority of its members.

The electoral system for the Senate differs from the one for the Chamber with regard to the level at which the distribution of seats takes place, the mechanisms for assigning the majority premium and the electoral thresholds. 309 seats are distributed separately and independently in each of the 20 regions. The majority premium and the electoral thresholds are also calculated on a regional base, yet following different formulas. In 17 regions all the seats are first assigned by a PR formula. In order to get seats an independent party list must have at least 8% of the total valid votes. If a party list is a member of a coalition the threshold is lowered to 3%. Coalitions may get seats only if they have at least 20% of valid votes and include at least one party list that has received equal or more than 3% of the votes. Once the seats have been proportionally assigned, if the winning coalition or independent list in the region obtained less than 55% of the seats at the regional level, then it receives the majority premium, i.e. as many additional seats as are necessary to reach the proportion of 55%, while an equivalent number of seats is taken from the other coalitions or independent lists. The losers get the rest of 45%. Seats are then distributed, for each coalition, among the various lists of which it is composed. Candidates are elected according to the order in which they appear on the list. In the remaining 3 regions– Molise, Valle d'Aosta and Trentino-Alto Adige – the allocation of seats follows different rules that take into account their territorial peculiarities. Finally, other 6 seats are allocated in a "foreign" constituency reserved to Italian residents abroad.

In contrast to what happens in the Chamber, there is no guarantee that the coalition or independent list with the largest number of votes nationally obtains an absolute majority of the seats in the Senate. Therefore, the electoral system for the Senate is not majority assuring. The effects of this crucial difference will become clearer by analysing the outcome of the 2013 elections in the two Chambers of Parliament.

## *The Results*

A comprehensive analysis of the election results<sup>1</sup> needs to distinguish not only between the Chamber and the Senate, but also, for each Chamber of Parliament, between the different arenas in which seats are distributed.

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<sup>1</sup> For a preliminary analysis of the 2013 elections outcome see also Ilvo DIAMANTI, "L'autobus di Grillo nel paese della politica-che-non-c'è", available online at [www.Repubblica.it](http://www.Repubblica.it), 13 July 2012.

The Chamber results given in Table 1 (see the Annex) are thus shown separately for the three arenas: the main one, decisive for the allocation of the majority premium, the Valle d'Aosta single-member district and the "foreign" constituency. In the first arena, the difference between the center-left (29.6% in total) and the center-right (29.2%) was of only 124.958 votes, less than 0.4% of the total of over 34 million valid votes. The real surprise was, however, the success of Grillo's independent list, the M5S, that obtained more than 8.5 million votes (25.6%), and turned out to be the largest individual party in the "domestic" arena<sup>1</sup>. The coalition led by Monti, finally, got 10.6% of the valid votes, fewer than many expected. Thanks to the majority premium, the tiny advantage of the center-left was transformed into a much larger difference in terms of seats: the center-left was assigned 340 (55.1%), the center-right 124 (20.1%), the M5S 108 (17.5%) and Monti's coalition 45 (7.3%). The results in the "foreign" constituency were also favourable to the center-left, while a candidate of a local party won the seat in Valle d'Aosta. Overall, in the Chamber, the final outcome of the distribution of seats was such as to give 345 to the center-left (54.8%), 125 to the center-right (19.8%), 109 to the M5S (17.3%), 47 to Monti's coalition (7.5%), and 4 to minor party lists.

As far as the Senate election is concerned, Table 2 (see the Annex) shows the results of the "domestic" segment and of the "foreign" segment separately. Here the vote difference between the center-left and the center-right was a little larger than in the Chamber: the former coalition got 31.9% of the total votes, while the latter 30%. In this case, however, unlike in the Chamber, the "national" plurality of votes didn't trigger the allocation of a majority premium, because the premium was not distributed at the national level. Premiums were instead attributed on a regional base, to the winning coalitions. The center-left won 11 regions out of 17. The center-right won the remaining 6 regions, among which the three with the largest number of seats at stake: Lombardy, Campania, and Sicily. The M5S won nowhere. Nevertheless it was the first or second best loser in every region. Monti's list came fourth, but in some regions – especially in southern Italy – it didn't reach the 8% threshold and therefore it received no seats. According to the overall result the center-left came out first with "only" 123 seats (39%), against the 117 seats (37.1%) of the center-right, 54 seats (17.1%) of the M5S, 19 seats (6%) of the Monti's list, and 2 seats for minor lists. This is a result that placed the winning coalition in the Senate far below the threshold of an absolute majority and just 6 seats in front of the main opposing coalition.

The result in the Senate, in other words, made it impossible to form not only a center-left majority, but also a post-electoral majority coalition between Bersani's center-left and Monti's center, which many considered the most likely outcome of these elections. In the end, considering that M5S was unavailable for a coalition with the PD, the only option left to the PD was to form – under the leadership of Enrico Letta – a "grand coalition" cabinet with SC, UDC and, inevitably, with Berlusconi's PdL.

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<sup>1</sup> Taking into account the overall distribution of votes, that is the votes cast in the "foreign" constituency included, the PD became the largest individual party with 25.5%, the M5S being second with 25.1% (see Table 1 again).

## *Vote and Territory*

The center-left did not win the elections because it failed to make significant electoral gains in those areas where the PdL and its allies have always had their strongholds, specifically the North-East and parts of the South.

In these areas, both the left and the right lost votes, but their relative strength did not change, as it is shown in Table 3 (see the Annex). This is what explains Bersani's failure. Though it lost heavily, the left remained the largest coalition in the regions of the so-called "red zone" where its support has deep historical roots<sup>1</sup> and where it controls local administrations. The right, however, maintained a competitive advantage in most of the North and in many parts of the South. The resilience of the right in many regions of the country helped Berlusconi to neutralize the majoritarian effects of the senatorial electoral system and to create a hung Parliament.

Therefore, one of the most relevant elements emerging from the political elections of 2013 is the regression of the two main center-right and center-left parties, PdL and PD, with respect to the previous election of 2008<sup>2</sup>. The M5S got 25.6% of the votes, the largest share for an individual party list in the domestic segment of the Chamber. This is indeed an impressive feat: in the history of the Republic after the elections of 1946 no new party has ever obtained a similar percentage at its first participation in the general elections. The success of Beppe Grillo's movement, for certain, occurred to the detriment of the other main parties, PD and PdL. In fact, Pierluigi Bersani's party went from 33.2% in 2008 to 25.4% in 2013, dropping almost 3.5 million votes along the way (i.e. a decrease of 7.8 percentage points). PD decreased in terms of votes in all the regions (with the exception of Molise). In this small southern region, PD increased of 4.7 percentage points, perhaps retrieving some of the votes of its ally in 2008, the IDV (whose leader, Antonio Di Pietro, comes from Molise). The losses for the PD are particularly high in Marche (-13.7 percentage points), Basilicata (-12.9), Umbria (-12.3), Apulia (-12.5), Lazio (-11.1), Sardinia (-11.0), Abruzzo (-10.9) and Calabria (-10.2). It must be emphasized that Marche and Umbria are both regions of the "red zone", i.e. traditional strongholds of PD. Conversely, the decrease in Lombardy (a conservative region from a political standpoint) is particularly small (-2.5 percentage points).

The decrease for Silvio Berlusconi's PdL has been even more salient, both as a percentage and as an absolute value. The PdL indeed went from 37.4% in 2008 down to 21.6% in 2013, a decrease of 15.8 percentage points. More than 6 million voters abandoned Berlusconi's party. PdL lost votes in all the regions of the country. These

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough examination of the characteristics of the red sub-culture and of the electoral behavior of the regions being part of it, see Carlo BACCETTI, Patrizia MESSINA, *L'eredità. Le subculture politiche della Toscana e del Veneto*, Liviana, Torino, 2009; Ilvo DIAMANTI, "Le subculture territoriali sono finite. Quindi (re)esistono", in Carlo BACCETTI, Silvia BOLGHERINI, Renato D'AMICO, Gianni RICCAMBONI (eds.), *La politica e le radici*, Liviana, Torino, 2010, pp. 45-60; Antonio FLORIDIA, "Le subculture politiche territoriali in Italia: epilogo o mutamento?", in Carlo BACCETTI, Silvia BOLGHERINI, Renato D'AMICO, Gianni RICCAMBONI (eds.), *La politica e le radici*, cit., pp. 61-79; and Lorenzo DE SIO (ed.), *La politica cambia, i valori restano? Una ricerca sulla cultura politica dei cittadini toscani*, Florence University Press, Firenze, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> For an in depth analysis of the 2008 Italian general elections, see Roberto D'ALIMONTE, Alessandro CHIARAMONTE (eds.), *Proporzionale se vi pare. Le elezioni politiche del 2008*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2010.

losses were particularly high in Sardinia (-22.1 percentage points), Lazio (-20.6), Sicily (-20.1), Abruzzo (-17.8) and Basilicata (-17.7). Conversely, the losses registered in Trentino Alto Adige (-10.0 percentage points) and Veneto (-8.7) are clearly below the national average.

The other new political actor of these elections is Mario Monti's list (SC), which gained almost 3 million votes, representing 8.3% of the total. The performance of SC is particularly good (above the national average) in some northern regions: Trentino Alto Adige (13.1%), Friuli Venezia Giulia (10.8%), Lombardy (10.7%), Piedmont (10.5%) and Veneto (10.1%).

These patterns are similar when we consider not parties, but coalitions. Indeed, the two main coalitions lost together nearly 11 million votes. In particular, the center-right lost a little more than 7 million votes (i.e. a decrease of 17.6 percentage points), while the center-left lost more than 3.5 million votes (i.e. a decrease of 8 percentage points). Once again, almost half of the center-right's electorate decided not to vote for Silvio Berlusconi's coalition. In the mirror, the center-left was abandoned by almost a fourth of its electorate. This electoral meltdown has involved both coalitions, even though the center-right registered the biggest losses, free-falling from 46.8% in 2008 to 29.2% in 2013. Furthermore, in 2008, the two coalitions together represented 84.4% of the total valid votes, while in 2013 they obtained "only" 58.7%. All this shows that the Italian party system<sup>1</sup> has entered a restructuring phase<sup>2</sup> with increasing electoral volatility<sup>3</sup>.

The center-right lost votes in all regions of Italy, but particularly in Sicily (-23.0 percentage points), Veneto (-22.7), Liguria (-20.5), Friuli-Venezia Giulia (-19.8), Sardinia and Lombardy (-19.4), Piedmont (-18.9). The losses in Piedmont, Lombardy and, especially, in Veneto are particularly marked because of the defection of former Northern League voters. Conversely, the losses registered in the majority of southern regions, and in Umbria and Tuscany, are below the national average. With regard to southern regions, the presence of several local lists in the center-right coalition partially compensated the losses of the PdL.

In similar fashion, the center-left electoral decline occurs in all the regions in Italy (with the exception of Trentino-Alto Adige). The most significant losses, those above the national average, were in the southern regions, especially in Molise (-16.7 percentage points), where it was known that Antonio Di Pietro's party no longer belonged to the coalition. The losses continued in Marche (-14.9 percentage points), Abruzzo (-14.3), Umbria (-11.8), Liguria (-11.4), Lazio (-11.8) and Sardinia (-10.8). Conversely, the losses registered in Lombardy were below the national average.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the evolution of the party system in Italy, see Alessandro CHIARAMONTE, "Dal bipolarismo frammentato al bipolarismo limitato? Evoluzione del sistema partitico italiano", in Roberto D'ALIMONTE, Alessandro CHIARAMONTE (eds.), *Proporzionale se vi pare...cit.*, pp. 203-228.

<sup>2</sup> Luigi CECCARINI, Ilvo DIAMANTI, Marc LAZAR, "Fine di un ciclo: la destrutturazione del sistema partitico italiano", in Anna BOSCO, Duncan McDONNELL (eds.), *Politica in Italia. I fatti dell'anno e le interpretazioni. Edizione 2012*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2012, pp. 63-82.

<sup>3</sup> For further information on the concept of electoral volatility, see Mogens N. PEDERSEN, "The Dynamics of European Party Systems: Changing Patterns of Electoral Volatility", *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 7, 1979, pp. 1-26 and Stefano BARTOLINI, "La volatilità elettorale", *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, vol. 16, 1986, pp. 363-400.



The inability of the main political coalitions to gather support may be caused by some concurrent phenomena. First, with respect to 2008, the electoral turnout<sup>1</sup> decreased by approximately 5 percentage points (i.e., almost 2.6 million votes). This drop is deeper than just the generational turnover (to be estimated at two percentage points in the downward). One can therefore hypothesize that a good portion of the total votes for the two main coalitions in 2008 ended in abstention in 2013. Moreover, the success of M5S consisted mainly in its capacity to obtain votes from the other two main center-left and center-right coalitions. Grillo's party has been able to collect votes nationally at a homogeneous level, its relative strongholds being Sicily (33.5%), Marche, and Liguria (32.1%). It is important to highlight that both Sicily and Liguria are regions where the center-right lost many votes compared to the 2008 elections and, at the same time, Marche and Liguria are two regions where the center-left (still compared to 2008) suffered losses above the national average. As for the center-left, it is important to note that the coalition's smallest loss was recorded in Lombardy, where the M5S only reached 19.6%, the worst percentage obtained by Grillo's movement with the exception of Trentino-Alto Adige (14.6%). The region of the "red zone" where the center-left registered the greatest losses, as we have already seen, is Marche, not by chance one of the regions where the M5S was most successful. In general, the M5S cuts across the traditional electoral geography, being competitive in all the regions of Italy. This means that Grillo's movement challenged the traditional coalitions in their strongholds: the right in the Northeast and in the South (especially in Sicily), the left in the "red zone".

Finally, Mario Monti's coalition, compared to the UDC in 2008, obtained better scores, both in absolute terms and in percentage points in all regions except for Sicily, where it lost almost 50.000 votes compared to 2008 (-0.8 percentage points). In Sicily, Monti and his coalition got 5.9% of the votes in the Senate and failed to have any candidates elected. At the national level, the center coalition led by Monti obtained almost 3.5 million votes, while the UDC had obtained more than 2 million votes by itself in 2008. In the diachronic comparison, it must be pointed out that Monti's coalition showed a territorial distribution of votes notably different from that of the UDC in 2008. The regions where it saw a greater increase in percentage points are Trentino-Alto Adige (+9.7 percentage points), Lombardy (+7.8), Piedmont (+6.9), Friuli-Venezia Giulia (+6.8), Veneto (+6.3), and Liguria (+6.1). The biggest electoral growth occurred therefore in these northern regions. In this respect, it is worth noting that the regions where Monti's list did not reach the senatorial electoral threshold of 8% were all in the center-south: Lazio, Sardinia, Abruzzo, Calabria, and Sicily.

In sum, these elections mark an evident electoral decline for the two main coalitions and parties of the center-left and center-right, both incapable of keeping a significant share of their own electorates. The increased electoral volatility<sup>2</sup> can be explained to a large extent by the growing political disaffection. On the other hand, there is now a different competitive dynamic in Italian politics. The old bi-polar politics is gone; now there are four (quadri-polar) relevant coalitions or parties. In

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the evolution in the Italian electoral turnout, see Dario TUORTO, "La partecipazione al voto", in Paolo BELLUCCI, Paolo SEGATTI (eds.), *Votare in Italia: 1968-2008. Dall'appartenenza alla scelta*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2010, pp. 53-79.

<sup>2</sup> The total electoral volatility for the 2013 general election is 39.1, calculated based on the Pedersen index, Mogens N. PEDERSEN, "The Dynamics of European Party Systems..cit.". This value is the highest in the history of Italy's Republic.

particular, a new political force, the M5S, has been highly competitive and a viable and popular choice for many electors who had previously cast their ballot for the center-right or center-left in 2008.

### *The Analysis of the Vote Shifts: Where Have Voters Gone?*

A useful criterion for understanding the result of the elections is the vote shift. Where have the voters of the previous election gone? Who got votes from whom? Have some parties suffered more the abstention? These questions are of particular importance in an election that saw the affirmation – from scratch – of a new list that has obtained a quarter of the valid votes. In order to answer these questions we use individual data from the ITANES post-electoral survey, comparing the respondents' vote in 2013 with the memory of their vote in 2008.

Table 4 (see the Annex) gives a matrix of the vote shifts that allows us to appreciate both the origins and destinations of votes for all the major parties as well as the area of electoral withdrawal/abstention. In addition, the effect of the choices of new voters, shown in the last column is also noteworthy.

The matrix shows in the columns the parties of 2008 and in the rows the parties of 2013. The political areas of the center-left and center-right are both bordered and the coalitions of the 2013 general elections are bordered with a thicker line. Cells that correspond to the confirmation in 2013 of the same party voted in 2008 are also highlighted in grey, taking into account the splits and the mergers.

A first aspect that deserves to be pointed out is that the share of votes that shifted between the two major areas of center-left and center-right is very small (less than 3% of valid votes). This share is however distributed unevenly between the two areas: almost all movements between the two areas (quadrants in the lower left and upper right) migrate actually from the center-right to the center-left, and particularly towards the PD. The only flow in the opposite direction is a small movement from the PD to the PdL, but the overall balance is clearly in favor of the center-left. The situation is similar as far as abstention is concerned: if in terms of remobilization of voters (third last column) the center-right has done as well as the center-left, this is not true in terms of voters' losses (penultimate row), that indeed hit hard the center-right, while leaving unscathed the center-left. These are the shifts that led to the collapse of the support for the center-right without leading however to a success of the center-left. The table shows us the reason why: the affirmation of Civic Choice (SC) and, above all, the great success of the M5S. Monti and Grillo drew support from both the left and the right. Considering the UDC a party member of the traditional center-right political area, it is clear that both SC and M5S had a crosscutting success, though the M5S was a little more competitive toward the left and SC toward the right. Monti got 1.9% of voters from the left and 2.6% of voters from the right, while Grillo 7.8% and 5.8% respectively. The key point is however that both new parties have been clearly perceived as crosscutting the traditional bipolar conflict of the Second Republic, and as a result got votes from both the center-left and the center-right. Furthermore, they collected votes in the former non-voting area and among young people at their first ballot. This is true especially for the M5S: Grillo's movement is by far the largest party among the youngest (penultimate column).

The overall picture that emerges from the matrix of vote shifts is ultimately quite understandable. First, the electoral crisis of the PdL has been confirmed, even though not as much as it appeared at the time of Berlusconi's resignation. Second, the center-left showed on the one hand a very limited ability to attract votes from the center-right, and failed on the other hand to prevent the defection of its voters to the M5S and even to SC.

### *The Socio-demographic Profile of the Italian Voters*

Who are the voters of the main Italian parties from a socio-demographic standpoint? In order to answer this question, we use individual data from IPSOS pre-election polls. Table 5 (see the Annex) shows the composition of the electorate of the main parties by age group and level of education. The M5S has been described in the literature as a "web-populist party"<sup>1</sup>, but it should be emphasized that it is also a party voted by the youngest and most educated sectors of Italian society, according to the results reported in the table: 35% of voters aged 18 to 24 voted for it, as well as 29% of voters holding a university degree and 31% of high-school graduates. On the other end, the M5S attracted only 14% of voters with an elementary education. However, the M5S did well not only among the youngest people, but also among the middle-age respondents. Indeed, 34% of voters aged 35 to 44 voted for it, as well as 32% of voters aged 45 to 55. The contrast with the PD and particularly with the PdL is clear-cut. Only 19% of young people and only 15% of those holding a university degree chose the PdL, as opposed to 27% of those with an elementary education. Finally, SC voters are overrepresented among those with a university degree. Conversely, LN voters are overrepresented among those with an elementary education.

The M5S is also a crosscutting party from a social standpoint (Table 6, see the Annex). In terms of employment/non employment status it received more votes than the other parties from all the sectors excluding retired people and housewives. Even among the self-employed, who have represented for a long time one of the main sources of support for the right-wing parties, the M5S did better in 2013 than the PdL (39% vs. 20%). On the other end, it is also the party that attracted a higher percentage of manual workers, unemployed and students than the PD. The PdL and the PD did better than M5S only among housewives (the PdL) and the retired (the PD). The PdL obtained percentages of votes above its average also among the unemployed, the retired and manual workers. The PD scored above its average in the public sector, as usual. SC did well among the entrepreneurs, professionals and managers (13%): the bourgeoisie is probably the sector of the Italian society in which Monti's political program attracted votes from the center-right. Finally, LN also has a crosscutting profile in terms of employment/non employment status, excluding students among which LN is underrepresented.

In conclusion, the M5S shows a crosscutting profile from a socio-demographic point of view, with a certain overrepresentation among the youngest and most

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<sup>1</sup> Piergiorgio CORBETTA, Elisabetta GUALMINI (eds.), *Il partito di Grillo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2013; Fabio BORDIGNON, Luigi CECCARINI, "5 Stelle, un autobus in MoVimento", *Il Mulino*, no. 5, 2012, pp. 808-816.

dynamics sectors of Italian society. The M5S has been compared to a bus<sup>1</sup>: everybody can find something appealing in its program. Nevertheless, the real bond of its composite electorate and the main reason of its present success maybe the demand for change which runs deep among people regardless their political affiliation or social status. This demand has favoured a widespread protest vote that Grillo has been able to capture thanks to a "post-ideological" message, a mobilizing campaign on the web and a populist stance against the old establishment. With regard to the other new political actor, Monti's list shows a clear elitist profile: it does well among the most educated and in the upper classes. Finally, PD and PdL gained votes especially in the sectors outside the labour market. In the long run, this is certainly not good news for the main parties of the center-left and of the center-right.

### *Concluding Remarks*

The 2013 vote might be a "critical election"<sup>2</sup>, that is an election revealing a sharp alteration of the pre-existing voter alignments and creating durable new groupings of voters. The following considerations may prove the point.

1) The extraordinary high level of electoral volatility clearly indicates that the percentage of voters who switched their preferences in this election was even greater than in 1994, at the time of the transition from the First to the Second Republic. Actually, in no other case since 1948 we have seen such an electoral change driven by a wave of popular dissatisfaction.

2) In 2013, as in 1994, we have witnessed the emergence of new parties, the most important being the M5S. Grillo's party obtained 8.5 million votes that previously had been casted to other parties, or had been lost in abstention. It did so running alone against the dominant center-right and center-left coalitions. As a whole, 8 million people who had voted for the right and 3.5 million who had voted for the left in 2008 defected. They went in different directions but very few crossed over to vote for the opposite side. The major beneficiary of the defections has been exactly the M5S, which explicitly placed itself outside and beyond the left-right political spectrum.

3) As a result of the electoral change, the concentration of votes on the two largest line-ups has been the lowest in the history of the Second Republic. Together, the center-left and the center-right coalitions have received only 58.3% of the votes for the Chamber and 74.6% of the seats. In 2008 the figures were 84.4% and 93.8% respectively. In 2006, 99.1% and 99.8%. In other words, the bipolar structure of the Italian party system has now almost collapsed, but it's not at all clear whether this is just a temporary circumstance or the starting point of a new type of party system.

4) For the first time in the Second Republic, elections have been inconclusive. The Senate has been left without a real winner. In spite of its poor performance and thanks to the electoral system, Berlusconi's center-right managed to prevent Bersani's center-left – the modest winner in the Chamber – from reaching the threshold of absolute majority of the seats in the Senate. Post-electoral negotiations between parties of

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<sup>1</sup> Fabio BORDIGNON, Luigi CECCARINI, "5 Stelle, un autobus in MoVimento", cit.; Ilvo DIAMANTI, "L'autobus di Grillo nel ... cit.".

<sup>2</sup> V.O. KEY, "A Theory of Critical Elections", *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1955, pp. 3-18.

different electoral coalitions and not the ballot, as in the previous elections, have consequently been the base for the formation of the new cabinet.

The next general election may be the conclusive evidence of the "critical" nature of the 2013 vote. And, considering the precariousness of the current governing coalition, we may not have to wait too long for it.

## ANNEX

Table 1  
Election Results, Chamber of Deputies 2013

Lists and coalitions	ITALY (majority premium)			VALLE D'AOSTA			FOREIGN CONSTITUENCY			TOTAL		
	No.	%	Seats	No.	%	Seats	No.	%	Seats	No.	%	Seats
Partito democratico (PD)	8.644.523	25.4	292	47.3	-	-	288.092	5	8.932.615	25.5	297	47.1
Sinistra ecologia libertà (SEL)	1.089.409	3.2	37	6.0	-	-	17.375	0	1.106.784	3.2	37	5.9
Centro democratico (CD)	167.072	0.5	6	1.0	-	-	-	-	167.072	0.5	6	1.0
SVP	146.804	0.4	5	0.8	-	-	-	-	146.804	0.4	5	0.8
Autonomie Liberté	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14.340	0.0	0	0.0
Démocratie	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Center-Left, Bersani's coalition (tot.)</i>	<i>10.047.808</i>	<i>29.6</i>	<i>340</i>	<i>55.1</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>10.367.615</i>	<i>29.6</i>	<i>345</i>	<i>54.8</i>
Il popolo della libertà (PdL)	7.332.972	21.6	97	15.7	-	-	145.824	1	7.478.796	21.3	98	15.6
Lega Nord (LN)	1.390.014	4.1	18	2.9	-	-	2.384	0	1.392.398	4.0	18	2.9
Fratelli d'Italia (FDI)	665.830	2.0	9	1.5	-	-	3.051	0	668.881	1.9	9	1.4
Others Center-Right	534.034	1.6	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	534.034	1.5	0	0.0
<i>Center-Right, Berlusconi's coalition (tot.)</i>	<i>9.922.850</i>	<i>29.2</i>	<i>124</i>	<i>20.1</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>10.074.109</i>	<i>28.7</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>19.8</i>
Scelta civica con Monti (SC)	2.824.065	8.3	37	6.0	-	-	180.674	2	3.004.739	8.6	39	6.2
Unione di centro (UDC)	608.210	1.8	8	1.3	-	-	1.355	0	609.565	1.7	8	1.3
Futuro e libertà (FLI)	159.332	0.5	0	0.0	-	-	-	-	159.332	0.5	0	0.0
<i>Center, Monti's coalition (tot.)</i>	<i>3.591.607</i>	<i>10.6</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>7.3</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>3.773.636</i>	<i>10.8</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>7.5</i>
Movimento 5 stelle (M5S)	8.689.458	25.6	108	17.5	-	-	95.041	1	8.797.902	25.1	109	17.3
Rivoluzione civile (RC)	765.188	2.3	0	0.0	-	-	15.910	0	781.098	2.2	0	0.0
Fare per fermare il declino (FFD)	380.756	1.1	0	0.0	-	-	10.160	0	391.664	1.1	0	0.0
Vallee d'Aoste	-	-	-	-	-	-	18.376	1	18.376	0.1	1	0.2
Mov. ass. italiani all'estero (MAIE)	-	-	-	-	-	-	140.473	2	140.473	0.4	2	0.3
USEI	-	-	-	-	-	-	44.024	1	44.024	0.1	1	0.2
Others (tot.)	604.857	1.8	0	0.0	-	-	44.754	0	668.390	1.9	0	0.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>34.002.524</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>617</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>982.327</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>35.057.287</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>630</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Source: Italian Ministry of Home Affairs

**Table 2**  
*Election Results, Senate 2013*

Lists and coalitions	ITALY (20 REGIONS)			FOREIGN CONSTITUENCY			TOTAL		
	Votes		Seats	Votes		Seats	Votes		Seats
	No.	%		No.	%		No.	%	
Partito democratico (PD)	8,408,958	26.9	105	274,732	34.0	4	8,683,690	27.0	109
Sinistra ecologia libertà (SEL)	912,308	2.9	7	-	2.3	-	912,308	2.8	7
Centro democratico (CD)	163,375	0.5	0	-	0.0	-	163,375	0.5	0
Il megafono - Lista Crocetta	138,581	0.4	1	-	0.3	-	138,581	0.4	1
Partito socialista italiano (PSI)	57,688	0.2	0	-	0.0	-	57,688	0.2	0
I moderati	14,358	0.0	0	-	0.0	-	14,358	0.0	0
SVP	97,141	0.3	2	-	0.6	-	97,141	0.3	2
SVP-PATT-PD-UPT	127,656	0.4	3	-	1.0	-	127,656	0.4	3
PD-SVP	47,623	0.2	1	-	0.3	-	47,623	0.1	1
Autonomie Liberté Démocratie	20,430	0.1	0	-	0.0	-	20,430	0.1	0
<i>Center-Left, Bersani's coalition (tot.)</i>	<i>9,988,118</i>	<i>32.0</i>	<i>119</i>	-	<i>38.5</i>	-	<i>10,262,850</i>	<i>31.9</i>	<i>123</i>
Il popolo della libertà (Pdl) <sup>a</sup>	6,914,885	22.1	99	136,052	32.0	0	7,050,937	21.9	99
Lega Nord (LN)	1,331,163	4.3	17	-	5.5	-	1,331,163	4.1	17
Fratelli d'Italia (FDI)	592,448	1.9	0	-	0.0	-	592,448	1.8	0
Grande Sud (GS)	122,100	0.4	1	-	0.3	-	122,100	0.4	1
Others Center-Right	542,178	1.7	0	-	0.0	-	542,178	1.7	0
<i>Center-Right, Berlusconi's coalition (tot.)</i>	<i>9,502,774</i>	<i>30.4</i>	<i>117</i>	-	<i>37.9</i>	-	<i>9,638,826</i>	<i>30.0</i>	<i>117</i>
Con Monti per l'Italia <sup>b</sup>	2,806,726	9.0	18	177,402	5.8	1	2,984,128	9.3	19
Movimento 5 stelle (M5S)	7,382,109	23.6	54	89,562	17.5	0	7,471,671	23.3	54
Rivoluzione civile (RC)	561,257	1.8	0	14,134	0.0	0	575,391	1.8	0
Fare per fermare il declino (FFD)	288,006	0.9	0	7,892	0.0	0	295,898	0.9	0
Vallee d'Aoste	24,609	0.1	1	-	0.3	-	24,609	0.1	1
Mov. ass. italiani all'estero (MAIE)	-	-	-	120,290	-	1	120,290	0.4	1
USEI	-	-	-	38,223	-	0	38,223	0.1	0
Others (tot.)	675,223	2.2	0	36,872	0.0	0	712,095	2.2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,228,822</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>895,159</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>32,123,981</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>315</b>

Source: Italian Ministry of Home Affairs

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Includes the votes and the seat got by the joint list Pdl-LN in the Trentino Alto Adige region; <sup>b</sup> Includes the votes got by the lists UDC and Scelta civica con Monti running respectively in Valle d'Aosta and in Trentino Alto Adige.

**Table 3**  
*Electoral Performance of the Main Parties and Coalitions in the Chamber of Deputies, Disaggregated by Regions*  
*(Differences in Percentage Points between the 2013 and 2008 General Elections)*

Region	PD		Pdl		SC		M5S		CENTER-LEFT		CENTER-RIGHT		CENTER (Monti)	
	% votes	2013-2008	% votes	2013-2008	% votes	2013-2008	% votes	2013-2008	% votes	2013-2008	% votes	2013-2008	% votes	2013-2008
Abruzzo	22.6	-10.9	23.8	-17.8	6.4		29.9		26.2	-14.3	29.5	-13.7	8.9	3.0
Basilicata	25.7	-12.9	19.1	-17.7	7.9		24.3		34.2	-10.3	24.6	-12.9	11.3	4.4
Calabria	22.4	-10.2	23.8	-17.4	5.5		24.9		28.3	-7.9	30.2	-13.6	10.5	2.3
Campania	21.9	-7.3	29.0	-20.1	6.7		22.1		26.0	-7.9	35.6	-15.9	11.3	4.8
Emilia R.	37.0	-8.7	16.3	-12.3	7.9		24.6		40.2	-9.8	20.9	-15.5	9.3	5.0
Friuli V. G.	24.7	-6.7	18.7	-16.1	10.8		27.2		27.5	-8.2	28.0	-19.8	12.9	6.8
Lazio	25.7	-11.1	22.8	-20.6	6.8		28.0		29.8	-11.1	27.9	-15.8	8.8	4.0
Liguria	27.7	-9.9	18.7	-18.1	8.4		32.1		31.1	-11.4	23.0	-20.5	9.9	6.1
Lombardy	25.6	-2.5	20.8	-12.7	10.7		19.6		28.2	-3.9	35.7	-19.4	12.1	7.8
Marche	27.7	-13.7	17.5	-17.5	8.4		32.1		31.1	-14.9	21.2	-16.0	10.7	4.5
Molise	22.6	4.7	21.0	-15.4	8.5		27.7		28.9	-16.7	28.4	-13.4	10.7	4.9
Piedmont	25.1	-7.4	19.7	-14.6	10.5		27.5		28.3	-9.2	28.1	-18.9	12.1	6.9
Apulia	18.5	-12.5	28.9	-16.7	7.8		25.5		26.5	-9.1	33.0	-14.4	10.5	2.6
Sardinia	25.2	-11.0	20.4	-22.1	6.0		29.7		29.4	-10.7	23.7	-19.4	9.4	3.8
Sicily	18.6	-6.8	26.5	-20.1	5.1		33.5		21.4	-7.4	31.3	-23.0	8.6	-0.8
Tuscany	37.5	-9.4	17.5	-14.1	6.9		24.0		41.6	-8.8	20.7	-12.9	8.4	4.3
Trentino A. A.	16.7	-7.8	10.9	-10.0	13.1		14.6		44.7	16.9	15.9	-14.4	13.9	9.7
Umbria	32.1	-12.3	19.5	-15.0	7.9		27.2		35.6	-11.8	24.3	-11.8	9.6	5.1
Veneto	21.3	-5.2	18.7	-8.7	10.1		26.3		23.3	-7.5	31.8	-22.7	11.9	6.3
Total	25.4	-7.8	21.6	-15.8	8.3		25.6		29.5	-8.0	29.2	-17.6	10.6	4.9





**Table 5**  
*Composition of the Electorate of MSS, PD, PDL, SC and LN by Age Group and Level of Education (% of each Category)*

	MSS	PD	PdL	SC	LN
Whole sample	25.6	25.4	21.6	8.3	4.1
By age group					
18-24	35	19	19	8	4
25-34	29	20	22	7	5
35-44	34	20	19	9	4
45-54	32	21	20	9	4
55-64	20	32	22	8	3
65 +	10	37	27	9	4
By level of education					
University degree	29	27	15	11	2
High school diploma	31	25	18	8	2
Middle school	28	23	23	8	4
Elementary	14	29	27	8	8

Source: IPSOS, Public Affairs. Database: 11.026 CATI interviews – pooled pre-election polls, February 18-22, 2013.

Table 6

*Composition of the Electorate of M5S, PD, PDL, SC and LN by Type of Work and Public vs. Private Employment (% of each Category)*

	M5S	PD	PdL	SC	LN
Whole sample	25.6	25.4	21.6	8.3	4.1
Entrepreneurs, professionals managers	25	23	17	13	3
Self-employed	39	15	20	7	3
Clerks/teachers	31	25	15	9	5
Manual workers	29	20	24	7	5
Unemployed	33	18	25	4	4
Students	37	23	11	9	1
Housewives	21	22	29	9	5
Retired	11	37	25	9	4
Public sector employees	31	29	14	9	4
Private sector employees	30	21	20	9	5

Source: IPSOS, Public Affairs. Database: 11.026 CATI interviews – pooled pre-election polls, February 18-22, 2013.